

# *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*

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## A STEP BACKWARDS

A new law passed by the Italian parliament, supposedly to restrict the activities of hunters, looks like being even less strict than previous legislation. The law was passed in January 1992 in response to 18 million Italians voting in a referendum in 1990 that existing regulations were too lax.

Under the new law, the hunting season in Italy ends on 31 January, instead of 10th March, as previously. However, each regional authority has the right to grant an exception to this rule. Similarly, although netting has been formally outlawed, regional authorities may authorize it for capturing decoys.

Regional authorities are also allowed to change the boundaries of the established no-hunting parks. Other measures include the withdrawal of the concept of "Fauna as a heritage of the state", which means that shooting a protected species is no longer considered as theft, and penalties for offenders have been reduced. Three birds have been added to the list of huntable

species, but none have been withdrawn.

Not surprisingly, the hunters are more than satisfied with these new laws. Their satisfaction contrasts with the indignation and outrage of environmentalists, who feel their efforts have simply been swamped by the pressure put on the government from the powerful hunting lobby. Barbara Lombatti from the International Department of LIPU, one of

the organisations that has been most active in the anti-hunting campaign, said "The EC Wild Birds Directive and the Berne Convention are mocked by this law. 1993, and the closer cooperation of Europe, is fast approaching, but Italy, as far as nature conservation legislation is concerned, is going backwards, and getting further away from the rest of the continent".



LIPU campaign poster (Photo: LIPU)

## OVER THE HILL

In March, ICBP extended activities in the Mount Kilum area. The Kilum Mountain Forest Project (see *World Birdwatch* 13,4:8-9) has to date concentrated on the area occupied by the Oku and Nso people. The Kom tribe occupy the land on the other (north-west) side of Mount Kilum. Although they are culturally different from the Oku and have their own language, the vegetation and soils of the area they occupy are very similar, and they face many of the same problems

as the Oku people. Forest clearance, fires; overgrazing and soil erosion are all threatening the existence of the forest. There has been a recent rural electrification project, and a sealed road should be completed in 1992. The area is developing fast, the natural resources must be managed sustainably.

Project activities will be similar to that which has proved so successful with the Oku, including environmental education and soil conservation programmes, tree nurseries and promotion of sustainable forest-based industries such as bee-keeping.



Farm land on Mount Kilum (Photo: H. Macloed)



Mist-netting provides invaluable information about bird populations (Photo: G. Tucker)

## MIST-NET PROBLEMS

In the last *World Birdwatch* (13,4:5) we reported a ban on the sale or export of mist-nets in Japan. This was largely the result of pressure from the Wild Bird Society of Japan and other environmental groups, as well as an ICBP resolution passed at the 1991 World Conference. This resolution was based on an alarming increase of illegal trapping with mist-nets in Asia and Europe.

The Japanese have moved with exemplary speed and thoroughness to address the problem. This has led to

the unfortunate side-effect of research institutions and scientists in Europe and America (including one of ICBP's own field projects) being unable to obtain mist-nets from Japan. Mist-nets are, of course, essential tools for a great number of field programmes.

ICBP has brought this serious problem to the attention of the Japanese government and asked for a simple mechanism whereby *bona fide* researchers and ornithologists can obtain the nets without undue problems. ICBP will keep interested parties informed of the outcome of these discussions.

## CONTENTS

### Editorial

- International Conference on Wetland and Waterfowl Conservation in South and West Asia, Karachi, December 1991
- Asian Waterfowl Census 1991
- International Symposium on Environmental and Hormonal Approaches to Ornithology
- The Indian Ornithological Society
- Second Report of the House Martin Study Group
- Aggressive Cranes
- Artificial Nest Boxes

### Articles

- Birds of Mussoorie by Dhananjai Mohan
- Thirty-five Years Ago by Lavkumar Khacher
- Indian Coursers in Chamarajanagar Taluk by B Siddaramaiah and G S Jayadeva
- Tailor Bird by Thomas F Martin

### Extracts

- Last Ditch Effort for Cranes
- Golden Eagles Killed
- Eagle Reintroduction Planned for Ireland
- Vulture Project Success
- Greek Bird Hunting
- Bird Toll of Gulf Oil Spill

### Synopsis

- Ecological Isolation of Bulbuls by VS Vijayan

### Correspondence

- An Unusual Get-together between a Squirrel and a Woodpecker by PO Nameer
- Magpie Robin preying on a Leech by S Karthikeyan
- Pygmy Woodpecker and Rufous Woodpecker in Bangalore by S Karthikeyan
- Flowers in the Dietary of Jerdon's Chloropsis by JN Prasad and U Harish Kumar
- Khaleej Pheasant near Kohora (Kaziranga) by Bibhab Kumar Talukdar
- Redwinged Crested Cuckoo at Arippa by C Susanth Kumar
- A Sunbird's Bath by Dr Vijay Tuljapurkar
- Butterfly Scares a Bird by N Soubadra and T Ganesh
- Possible Sighting of a Bay Owl in Anaimalai Hills by R Kannan

- Albinism in Birds by Salim Javed
- Albinism in Little Brown Dove by Salim Javed
- An Unusual Nesting Site of Pied Myna by Jugal Kishor Tiwari
- Site and Breeding Record of Indian Jungle Crow from Pali District Rajasthan by Jugal Kishor Tiwari
- Sighting of a Punjab Raven at Kota by Rakesh Vyas
- Breeding of Hoopoe in Electric Meter Box by R.G. Soni
- Albinism in Birds by R.G. Soni
- Some Common Traits and Rare Behaviour of the Koel by Thomas F Martin

### Announcement

- Experienced Birdwatchers Required. 1992 Autumn Migration Survey, Israel
- OBC-Fork-tail-Leica Award 1992

### News From ICBP

#### Editorial

International Conference on Wetland and Waterfowl Conservation in South and West Asia, Karachi, December 1991

The International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB) is an example of what non-governmental institutions can achieve by education and appropriate representation to Governments. Conventions like the one passed at RAMSAR, would not achieve their objectives unless a body like the IWRB constantly reminded the Authorities about its existence and helped with its implementation. At the Karachi Conference the following action plan was drawn up for India:

1. A review should be undertaken of the success of the existing national and state wetland committees, with a view to using these as models for other countries in the region.
2. The national wetland inventory currently in progress should be completed as soon as possible, and published for wide dissemination.
3. The current status and management of the six Ramsar sites in India should be reviewed, and priorities for action identified.
4. Consideration should be given to the designation of additional Ramsar sites especially in large coastal wetlands such as Gulf of Kachchh, Point Calimere and Gulf of Mannar.
5. The Government of India should review and report to the Ramsar Convention Bureau on the potential impacts of the project currently being designed for the management of Chilka Lake, Orissa.

6. International or local agencies should be encouraged to provide technical advice to the Department of Environment, Orissa State, to assist in designing a management plan for Chilka Lake.
7. Management plans should be developed and implemented for other wetlands of International importance, in particular, Pulicat Lagoon (Andhra Pradesh), Kolleru Lake (Andhra Pradesh) and Kaliveli Tank (Tamil Nadu).
8. The recommendations of the recently completed study on the Gulf of Kachchh, shortly to be debated at a workshop in Gujarat, should be strongly considered for implementation.
9. The impact of the proposed shrimp and fish culture project of Government of India/World Bank in eastern India should be reviewed to assess the potential impacts on coastal wetlands.
10. The Government of India should pursue further possibilities for dialogue and collaboration with neighbouring countries on the issue of trans-boundary wetland systems. The following systems should be the focus of initial discussions:
  - (a) Sundarbans Mangrove Forest (India/ Bangladesh);
  - (b) Kosi Tappu (India/Nepal);
  - (c) Rann of Kachchh/Lower Indus Valley (India/Pakistan).
11. A national plan should be developed for migratory waterbird research and conservation in India. This should identify an agency or agencies responsible for coordinating and controlling activities, maintaining a data bank on previous studies and disseminating results.
12. The analysis of results from previous studies on migratory waterbirds should continue, and these results should be disseminated throughout India and to neighbouring countries as soon as possible to provide a baseline for future studies.
13. Greater efforts should be made to implement activities under the Indo-Soviet Migratory Bird Agreement, and to participate in the development of regional agreements.

If these recommendations are to be implemented the existing societies concerned with Ornithology – BNHS, WWF, Birdwatchers Field Club of Bangalore, SACON (Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History), and the newly formed (but yet to be registered) Indian Ornithological Society, must form a Steering Committee,

with a Convenor who can pursue these objectives and have them implemented. Any suggestions regarding the persons who could form the Steering Committee (and have the time to devote to it) would be welcome.

Among the specific recommendations of the Karachi Conference is the one relating to the Siberian Crane. The action to be taken by India is listed here :

On 14 December 1991, crane specialists from India (4), Islamic Republic of Iran (4), Pakistan (4), the USSR (2) and the USA (4) met in Karachi to discuss objectives for last-ditch efforts to save the central flock and to promote the increase of the western flock. These objectives are listed as follows :

1. Dr S Bhawe, using a small fixed-wing aircraft in January 1992 will conduct extensive surveys over the wetlands within the historic wintering range of the Siberian Cranes. If cranes are located, the birds and their habitats will be photographed from the air and, by walkie-talkie, the location will be reported to a ground crew who will travel by car to the site.
2. If Siberian Cranes are located, ground studies will be undertaken by Dr Vijayan and team from the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology. They will work with local people and officials to promote sound conservation objectives and practices.
3. Indian researchers will call or fax colleagues in Pakistan when the cranes migrate in late winter or early spring.
4. The Government of India and the State of Rajasthan should combine forces to implement conservation recommendations of the Bombay Natural History Society who just completed eleven years of research at Keoladeo National Park. These include :
  - (a) placing 800 water buffalo in the Park to control the spread of noxious grasses that degrade the quality of the wetlands for use by Siberian Cranes;
  - (b) ensuring that adequate supplies of water are released into the Park at the end of July;
  - (c) allowing villagers to harvest Khus grass (*Vetiveria zizanoides*) for thatch to prevent its spread; and
  - (d) removing the calves of the feral cattle to prevent the growth of the herd.
5. Using three platform terminal transmitters (i.e. satellite transmitters) provided by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, researchers from the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology will monitor the migration of three Common Cranes captured on their wintering grounds near Keoladeo National park. These cranes may eventually become 'lead birds' for Siberian Cranes released in the USSR.

## Asian Waterfowl Census 1991

At the end of the 5 year period, the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB) can be proud of what they have achieved. All the wetlands surveyed have been listed and the number of each species counted in the States and Union Territories are recorded. Such an analysis would have been impossible before the computer age. It also shows the growing interest in Ornithology. In India, we see from the report that several hundred birdwatchers participated in the count.

But one comment about India in the Report merits serious consideration by the Organisers. "..... it must be noted that in India in general, many of the sites (over 320) counted in 1991 are new ones whereas many of those counted in the past 4 years (over 700) have not been counted again. This is going to be a major drawback to calculate trends.... which is unfortunate due to the extreme importance of India for many species". Going over the same ground over many years is obviously of great value.

It is nice to see the name of Taej Mundkar with Christian Perennou as the Compiler of the Report. Mundkar has contributed many valuable articles to our Newsletter.

## International Symposium on Environmental and Hormonal Approaches to Ornithology

In the Jan-Feb 1992 issue Dr Mrs Asha Saklani reported on this Symposium. Judging from the abstracts of papers presented, the participants had plenty of valuable wares to display. In the Nutrition of Birds, Mary E Murphy of Washington State University says:

"Free-living birds must satisfy fluctuating nutrient requirements in diverse and varying environments. They may typically fulfill these requirements incidentally by random foraging to meet energy requirements or by selective foraging based on the energy density or physical properties of foods. In some environments, however, and especially during productive phases (e.g. growth, egg production, moult), free-living birds are sometimes observed to progressively modify the composition of their diets and choose foods in combinations disproportional to availability. The selective or nonrandom foraging is often interpreted as a compensatory adjustment in the behaviour of the birds to ensure that they acquire a full complement of essential nutrients.

Such interpretations of nonrandom foraging always assume that wild birds possess a variety of specific and sensitive appetites for essential nutrients that allow them to quickly detect nutrient deficiencies or imbalances and to respond by appropriate adjustments in the proportions or

types of foods ingested. Often such interpretations also include secondary assumptions regarding (1) the liability of preferences for non-nutritive cues, (2) the interactions between non-nutritive and nutritive cues, and (3) the cognitive and metabolic abilities of birds to effectively and efficiently select a combination of foods that allows them to maximize the utilization of essential nutrients (dietary complementation)."

I wonder if it is possible to notice the changing food habits of birds without killing them and examining their stomachs in different seasons. If by observing them closely in the field through binoculars, their dietary regimes can be identified, it would add greatly to the scientific pleasure of birdwatching.

## The Indian Ornithological Society

During the Garhwal Symposium reported above, Dr Asha Saklani suggested that an Indian Ornithological Society be formed. It appears that several participants of the meeting including S Subramanya, Ranjit Daniels, BM Parasharya, Manjit Dhindra, Dinesh Mohan, P Lal, Dinesh Bhat and some others were "enthusiastic" about the creation of this body which would among other things:

Provide a forum for people interested in every aspect of Ornithology, basic and applied.

Give an impetus to Ornithological research in India.

Establish a platform for exchange of ideas between ornithologists in India and abroad and bring together conservationists, managers, policy makers to evolve strategies for effective management of avifauna in the Indian Sub-continent.

Organise Symposia and training courses from time to time.

It seems that in absentia I was elected President of the proposed Indian Ornithological Society. Asha Saklani is going ahead with the registration of the Society and I have been requested to select the first Executive Committee. What criteria should we adopt – a fair geographical distribution – commitment from people who can give some time to this "cause"? What membership fees shall we fix (Rs.50/- per year)?

These are a few stray thoughts which have to be brought into focus fairly quickly. Do write to me. The more ideas which come in the better. While I am President one idea will predominate - not to come in the way of any society or individual who is doing good work, but to assist in every way we can, and look out for gaps in the field of ornithology which need to be overcome.

## Second Report of the House Martin Study Group, 64 North Parade, Grantham, Lincs N63, 8AN UK

Bird ringing is time consuming and difficult. No wonder that Keith Bowden opted out of the group reckoning "that the game was not worth the candle" since it required one man hour of effort per bird. But useful data is coming in. Out of the 1076 birds ringed since 1987, there have been as many as 105 recaptures from previous years. It appears that males are more faithful to their traditional breeding sites than females (a surprise for humans) "44 males returned to this own villages as against 21 females".

One fact which the Group wanted to discover was "where the birds roost at night when not in their nests". In the sky like swifts, in the trees in nearby wood, or where? Many House Martins have been seen coming to the colony early morning "before those that have been roosting in their nests sally forth" Artificial nests are useful for bird study. As the Report Says "The beauty of artificial nest is that they can be taken down, the pulli ringed when they are at the right age and the nest replaced". With regard to artificial nesting sites Sir Landsborough Thomson, in the New Dictionary of Birds says: "Another point of evolutionary interest is the extent to which some species have become dependent on man-made structures for their nesting sites. Although some species use the natural or the artificial site, according to circumstances others practically never use anything except a building. However nearly equivalent the new site may be to the original natural one, the definite preference for it does involve a change in adaptation. It is only within the last few centuries that suitable building can have existed over great part of the present range of species now normally using them". Perhaps the House Martin Group could also check if human architecture is proving more attractive to these birds than their own construction. This is possibly a loaded question taking their name into account.

Incidentally A Field Guide to the Birds of South-East Asia by Ben King and others has excellent illustrations of House Martins and other members of the Swallow family.

## Aggressive Cranes

Mr Fareed Tyabji, Sub PO Vadala Mahadeo Taluka Shrirampur, District Ahmednagar 413 739 has been farming in this area for over fifty years. In the early 30's and 40's he had the good fortune of seeing scores of Great Indian Bustards (known locally as Tukdars) and hundreds of Blackbuck leaping over the banks of the newly engineered Pravara Canal. The Blackbuck and the Bustards have disappeared, but in a recent letter he says: "As usual Cranes descended on a field of gram. The owner threw a stone or stick at them to scare them away. Instead of flying away, they attacked him and wounded him so badly that he was in hospital for 15 days. He was saved because he had a rug to wrap himself".

This is a surprising piece of news, but under provocation even a worm will turn. There are 14 species of Cranes in the world and in Birds of the World, the author Oliver L Austin (Jr) says: "Cranes tame fairly easily. Perhaps their only future in a world with an expanding human population is as exotic zoo captives. They are so magnificent in the wild, this seems criminal".

## Artificial Nest Boxes

SA Chellappa, 8/186 Vidhyanagar, Thanjavur 613 004, TN made an attempt to remove a pair of nesting sparrows from the wall of their well and relocate them in a nest box. He put up a nest box in the drawing room "The pair of House Sparrows needed very little coercion to accept this new nesting site, but .... our plan (was) ruined when a pair of Blackheaded (Brahminy) Mynas came to the scene ...." Eventually the House Sparrows were driven out. So human interference did not help the sparrows. The author refers to an interesting fact that "Neem fruits were fed to the youngsters (Brahminy Mynas) as a whole". As a result of the nest box "considerable number of viable neem seeds have reached a wrong place and lost the chance of growing into tall trees ...." What is the lesson? Leave nature alone.

## BIRDS OF MUSSOORIE

DHANANJAI MOHAN, 28 Trevor Rd, PO New Forest, Dehra Dun 248 006

I wonder how a 1970 issue of the Newsletter found its way into my home because I was only 5 years old then. Even today this Jan 1970 issue makes an extremely enjoyable reading. Amongst other articles, one which was of special significance to me was Birds of Mussoorie by Mr Sudhir Vyas. Being a resident of Dehradun I get umpteen

opportunities to visit Mussoorie and when in 1990 summer I stayed there for nearly four months, I felt like observing the changing bird pattern in and around Mussoorie with Mr Vyas's article as base reference. Although the article by Mr Vyas does not have any quantitative data, the words like common, frequent, rare etc. give a good insight about



the relative abundance of various bird species in Mussoorie.

Despite the mushrooming concrete jungle and deforestation in the private estates in the last two decades, the bird scene in Mussoorie has not changed considerably as far as the specific diversity is concerned. Most of the species which find a mention in the article by Mr Vyas were seen by me with similar levels of abundance. However I was't fortunate enough to see a Sirkeer Cuckoo which he saw once. Nor are the Kokla (Wedge tailed Green Pigeon) as common as they were before and I had to be content with a single sighting. Kaleej Pheasants however are still commonly seen in the brushwood along the Kemptoy road. The Black Partridges too were common and the hills resounded with their calls in the morning. Kestrel was the only falcon that I saw. On a couple of occasions I saw Goshawks gliding and being annoyed by Jungle Crow. On the Kemptoy road I once saw the Honey Buzzard. Himalayan Griffon, Lammergeier and Scavenger Vultures were often seen gliding over the valley while the White-backed and the King Vultures were seen occasionally, both of which do not find a mention in the old article. Pariah Kites were commonly seen instead of the Large Indian Kite mentioned earlier (or was it a case of mistaken identity).

Red-winged Shrike-Babbler is another noted absentee. However, the gap was filled by the sighting of Bar-throated Sivas which I saw once on the Kemptoy Road. Maroon Oriole too is as rare as ever and I'd be satisfied with a single sighting of a female. Drongos, Himalayan Tree-pies, Red-billed Blue Magpies are still quite abundant.

Hoopoes and House Swifts are still seen around the inhabitation. Amongst the other three Swifts mentioned in the earlier article I could only see the Alpine Swift on a couple of occasions.

I saw the Barred Owlet once and often heard the bell like call of the Himalayan Scops Owl while strolling on the dark and lonely roads. Scarlet Minivets could be seen only in loose flocks and that too occasionally. Same was true for Himalayan Black Bulbul.

The wailing calls of Great Himalayan Barbet were heard from all the corners of Mussoorie. The Brown fronted Pied

Woodpecker was also everpresent, whereas the Scalybellied Green, the Blacknaped Green and the Himalayan Pied were found only in the Greener outskirts of Mussoorie.

The Himalayan Whistling Thrush still remains the most conspicuous bird, but in the last two decades it seems that Jungle Crows and House Sparrows have drastically increased in numbers as a direct side-effect of the growing human population of the town. Grey-winged Blackbird was regularly seen around the company gardens but the Chestnut-bellied and the Blue-headed Rock Thrush eluded me in the immediate surroundings of the town. They could only be seen well beyond the municipal limits of Mussoorie. Amongst Laughing Thrushes only Streaked was common and the White-throated could be seen only in the better forested area a little away from the town. So as far as the Thrushes are concerned the scene is as dismal as it was two decades back.

The only Warbler that was common throughout the summer was the Grey-headed Flycatcher-warbler. I could identify only the Olivaceous and the Pallas's out of the three distinct species of leaf warblers seen in the month of April. Mixed parties of Tits and Warblers were a treat to watch. Whereas Red-headed Tit preferred to remain in the hunting party, the Yellow-cheeked and Green-backed remained a little away from the rest. White-tailed Nuthatch and Himalayan Tree Creeper too were loosely associated with the mixed parties.

Surprisingly none of the Buntings/Finches find a mention in the old article. Rock bunting was seen in the Happy Valley play ground, and close to Kemptoy an occasional Crested Bunting would be seen flying across the road. Small flocks of Spot-winged Grosbeak were intermittently seen around the company gardens. Everpresent Cinnamon Tree Sparrows were a refreshing sight.

It seems that the birds of Mussoorie have managed to bear the onslaught of development till now. But will they be able to do the same in the years to come remains to be seen.

## THIRTY FIVE YEARS AGO

LAVKUMAR KHACHER

I have been going through the 1991 Newsletters. Thirty two years is a long time to almost singlehandedly keep a publication alive. It also is a long time to keep a friendship alive along with memories of it. You dear editor, have been marvellous! Perhaps you will permit me to share our secret

with our widening friends circle. Thirty five years ago I have been your guest at your lovely Andheri house now gone up into multistorey buildings. We had just sat down to breakfast – the Honorary Secretary of the prestigious natural history society (BNHS) and his visiting bird

watcher friend – when a call was uttered in the trees outside. I was quizzed and asked you what bird it was and you were unable to enlighten me. As we both ate our hot toasts with butter thoroughly perplexed, your then teenaged son back from boarding school was suppressing quite unsuccessfully, his mirth. You will remember that morning when two birdwatchers were told that the calls they were perplexed about emanated from a Five-striped Palm Squirrel. That moment of great fun is still vividly in my mind and I always like to warn my younger friends to be careful about identifications.

It is keeping this memory in mind that I would like to correct Dr JC Uttangi about where “electric sparks” (Vol. XXXI, No. 7 & 8) emanate in Ashy Wren-Warblers. It is the quick flick of the wings which produces this sound! I have a pair living in my compound and they regularly come to feed at the feeding station on my patio where I sit enjoying a variety of birds coming to feed.

This brings me to the matter of how important feeding birds has become. At my feeding station I started with Redvented Bulbuls, Large Grey Babblers, Common Mynas and Brahmini Mynas. They all were ready to feed on crushed chapati pieces. Over the last few years, more insectivorous species have started feeding on very fine powdered chapatis. Indian Robins came first to pick up black ants that came for the crumbs, they were followed by Tailor birds and a pair of Common Babbler with the “Electric Sparks” birds being the latest. This acceptance of non-traditional food can be explained by the paucity of insect food available thanks to the destruction of vegetation and widespread and indiscriminate use of pesticides.

While I am on a writing spree, I might give here another anecdote. When I moved to Gandhinagar five years ago the

corals were in full bloom. I also remember being perplexed by the Large Grey Babblers having dark breasts. For an instant I thought of collecting specimens and sending them to the Society to be identified as a new subspecies. Before I could do the dastardly act, the flowers withered and the dark breasts became normal. The birds were having pollen brushed onto their breasts. So here was another popular fallacy that it is the foreheads which get smeared and act as pollen brushes — for the large bird pollinated flowers, specially of *Erythrina*, it is the breast which is dusted and transfers the pollen. Right now, the corals are in full bloom and the Brahminy Mynas visiting the feeding station as well as the Large Grey Babblers, both species have acquired dark breasts. To corroborate my observation, I examined the flowers of Coral - the pollen is dark brown, not yellow.

I have sent two notes to BHNS, one on my observations of Little Green Bee-eaters feeding on the tiny sand crabs on the beach and the other on the spectacular Great Plover of tidal mudflats being highly gregarious and very confiding. Thirty five years is a long time to watch birds!

#### A Question or Two

On the backcover of Vol. XXXI No. 7 & 8 of the Newsletter I was saddened by the tragedy reported. What is the state of the sanctuary today?

I am intrigued to read that IWRB, UK considers the Darter as one of the most endangered of species. On what premises is this status arrived at? All our resident, colonially nesting water birds are in great danger of extinction and we must take some immediate action to highlight this fact.

## INDIAN COURSERS IN CHAMARAJANAGAR TALUK

B SIDDARAMAIAH and G S JAYADEVA, Department of Zoology, JSS College, Chamarajanagar 571 313

Indian-courers are patchily distributed throughout the drier parts of the Indian union. However, Dr Salim Ali has not met with the same during his survey “Birds of Mysore” in Chamarajanagar taluk during his visit on 6 to 13 November 1939 [Ali S, 1943 Birds of Mysore, JBNHS, V.44(2): pp.202-220]. However major Phythian Adams has observed the Indian courers near Gundlupet and Mysore, and has collected eggs C /2, C /2 during 9 June 1936 and C /1 on 28 June 1936; (Ali S, 1943). He found the courers frequenting bare waste lands and stony plains with scattered scrub.

On our bird watching trip on 1 December 1991 to Honganur tank north of Chamarajanagar town about 10

km away, near a village called Rechambali, we came across a party of 6 Indian courers, *Cursorius coromandelicus*. They were feeding on an uncultivated waste land surrounded by cultivated lands. They were running about swiftly and picking up insects every now and then. We approached them slowly until the distance between us was about 100 ft. We watched their movement for about 20 minutes between 5 and 5.20 p.m. When we tried to move closer to them they were alarmed and 5 of the 6 birds flew off. The remaining one bird stayed on for a few minutes and flew in the same direction.

When we exchanged our experience of having sighted the courers in Chamarajanagar taluk with the members of



MAN (Mysore Amateur Naturalists), they revealed the sighting of coursers in Mandakalli Airport near Mysore and near Bannur of Mandya district. In Bannur the coursers were sighted during January 1990 in dry paddy fields abutting the Bannur tank. The courses were also sighted by

members of MAN near Maddur tank of Yelandur taluk on 23 January 1992. The Newsletter for Bird Watchers 29(1 & 2): 4 Paresh UK 1989 reports about the Indian Coursers near Bangalore.

## OUR NATIVE TAILOR BIRD

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Our Native Tailor Bird *Orthotomus sutorius* belongs to the family Muscicapidae and the subfamily Sylviinae — a group comprising of Warblers, some species of which are well-known for their melodious songs.

The male has a longer tail than the female, with the forehead and crown exhibiting a reddish-brown hue and the wings and upper parts tinged with olive-green. The chin, throat, breast and belly vary from a very faint trace of green to near white. The female is without the reddish-brown marking on the forehead and crown, but the upper parts are predominantly olive-green of darker shade than the under parts. The species attain a length of 13 cm or thereabout at full maturity, being smaller in build than the common house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) by about 2 cm.

An outstanding characteristic of our native tailor bird is the dexterity with which it builds its nest. The bird employs one or more green leaves which it sews together to form an elongated pouch. In this operation, the bird pierces the edges of the leaf or two with its bill and then binds them together by passing plant stalks, hairs and gossamer taken from a spiders web, through the holes and then knots them firmly to prevent the strands from slipping out. The holes are pierced at intervals ranging from half to one and a half cm apart. In addition to this stitching of the leaves to form the living room, the bird also arranges a number of leaves to form a sort of watertight canopy to protect the nest from rain and perhaps hot sunshine. The bowl of the pouch is lined with soft feathery-like plant matter and the down of cotton trees. The whole construction of the nest is truly an excellent example of the tailor bird's ingenuity.

According to some of my elder village friends of yester-years who had been privileged to closely observe the mating and nidification practised by the species, the breeding habits of the tailor bird are not timed as seasonably as with most other wild birds, and that their mating season is spread over a longer period of months — in other words, the species mate and breed throughout the year without any definite breeding season. The bird lays an average of 4 eggs, but I am not aware of or informed about the incubation period and development.

A family of the species has been resident in the front garden of my neighbor, from where they often make forages into the front-yard of my residence and an adjacent plot of vacant land in search of their daily fare — spiders, insects of sorts, and wild berries at times which are in plentiful supply among the trees, scrub and creepers that grace the place. It has been my good fortune to observe some of the habits of our tailor bird over a period of five years since I took up residence in the area. My observations confirm that the species have a repertoire of vocal accomplishments and are truly gifted songsters. Some of the calls voiced by these graceful visitors sound not unlike (1) too-wee-too-wee-too-wee....., (2) pitchy-pitchy-pitchy....., (3) chirr-chirr-chirr....., (4) chic-chic-chic.... and (5) chewee-chewee-chewee..... As a matter of interest, I had on several occasions noted the number of repetitive calls made by these graceful little birds and came by the astonishing figure 200. Verily, a surprising demonstration of lung-power for so tiny and petite a bird. I also observed that "to-wee-to-wee-to-wee...." and "pitchy-pitchy-pitchy ...." are the two most favourite calls voiced by these visitants. Another characteristic which struck me most forcefully are the number of times these visitants bob their heads up and down, and from side to side when calling in the manner of their above mentioned favourite utterances. When not calling, the bird appears extremely restless as it hops about from place to place with an occasional flip of the tail, and sometimes seemingly genuflecting as if about to make an address. Truly an interesting species to have around and to hold one's absorbing interest.

### EXTRACTS

#### LAST DITCH EFFORT FOR CRANES

In 1991, in the Siberian village of Gorki, six Siberian, or Great White, Cranes *Grus leucogeranus* chicks were hatched artificially from eggs flown from the US and Germany. One chick died and in June the five survivors were taken by helicopter to the territory of one of the only two known wild pairs of cranes in western Siberia. A researcher from the International Crane Foundation, dressed as a crane, taught the cranes to feed and protected them from predators. It was hoped that in August the chicks, fitted

with radio-transmitters, would join the wild cranes and migrate south to India or Iran. Although more than 2500 Siberian cranes survive in the far eastern Soviet Union, the western population numbered only 14 in the 1990-1991 winter.

Source: *The ICF Bugle*, August 1991, 4.

## GOLDEN EAGLES KILLED

Almost 20 pairs of golden eagles *Aquila chrysaetos* were shot, poisoned or trapped in Padasjarvi, their best nesting area in northern Finland in 1991. Of 40 fledglings only one is now expected to survive. The killings shocked scientists from Oulu University, which has been running a conservation project for the eagle for the past 15 years, sponsored by the Finnish Ministry of the Environment and WWF-Finland. Local reindeer owners are suspected of the killings; they say that eagles kill newborn reindeer. The Finnish Government already compensated owners for losses but the reindeer owners' association wants the government to replace per capita payments with a fixed annual amount to prevent eagles being killed.

Source: *WWF-news*, October, 1991, 8.

## EAGLE REINTRODUCTION PLANNED FOR IRELAND

Captive-bred young whitetailed sea eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla* from the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland are being sent to the Fota Island Wildlife Park, County Cork, Ireland. They will be released to selected sites in counties Kerry and Clare within 2 years. The eagle was hunted to extinction in Ireland 90 years ago.

Source: *BBC Wildlife*, August, 1991, 526.

## VULTURE PROJECT SUCCESS

The project to reintroduce griffon vultures *Gyps fulvus* to the Causses region of France celebrated its tenth anniversary in 1991. Between 1981 and 1987, 69 birds were released and the first successful breeding in the wild occurred in 1982; 19 chicks hatched in 1991, bringing the total number to over 100.

Source: *Fonds d' Intervention pour les Rapaces*, 29 rue de Mont Valerien, 92210 St Cloud, France.

## GREEK BIRD HUNTING

An estimated 700,000 protected birds are wounded or killed each year in Greece including possible 4000 buzzards. The Greek Centre for the Care of Wild Animals

and Birds on the island of Aegina alone receives 150-200 buzzards wounded by hunters. Although hunting is forbidden in cold or snowy weather the law is rarely enforced and hunters object to Greek hunting laws being brought into line with EC regulations.

Source: *Nature*, *Bulletin of the Hellenic Society for the Protection of Nature*, January, March 1991, 44.

## BIRD TOLL OF GULF OIL SPILL

The Gulf War oil spill in the first part of 1991 was the largest ever. Approximately 460 km of shoreline were heavily oiled. The most conspicuous fauna to suffer were seabirds, particularly black-necked and great crested grebes, *Podiceps nigricollis* and *P. cristatus*, and Socotra and great cormorants, *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis* and *P. carbo*. At least 25,000-30,000 seabirds died. One of the most significant impacts may have been on waders, 260,000 of which winter on the Saudi Arabian coast; apart from direct damage from the oil these birds would have suffered severe food shortages on the oil-covered tidal flats. There was a massive mortality of invertebrates but only five marine turtles were known to have died and a large die-off of marine mammals (14 dugongs and 78 cetaceans) may not have been linked with oil pollution.

Source: *ICBP snf WCMC*, Cambridge, UK.

## SYNOPSIS

### THE ECOLOGICAL ISOLATION OF BULBULS, V S Vijayan

The following is the synopsis of a Thesis on "The Ecological Isolation of Bulbuls (family Pycnonotidae, class Aves) with special reference to *Pycnonotus cafer cafer* (Linnaeus) and *P. luteolus luteolus* (Lesson) at Point Calimere, Tamil nadu" submitted to the University of Bombay for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Zoology, by V S Vijayan, under the guidance of Dr Salim Ali, D.Sc., F.N.A., Department of Field Ornithology, Bombay Natural History Society.

It is a generally accepted axiom in biological science that closely related species when coexisting must have dissimilar ecological requirements to avoid serious interspecific competition. Though this concept had been maintained by several authors prior to Gause, it is widely known as "Gause's hypothesis or principle".

Considerable work has been done in this aspect better known as Ecological Isolation, on various species of birds inhabiting mostly Europe, America and Africa. In India no serious studies have so far been undertaken except on vultures in Gir Forest. Bulbuls (family Pycnonotidae) were selected for the present study, since many closely related

species of this family are frequently found living together in a number of locations.

Ecological isolation between the two species of bulbul *P. cafer cafer* (Linnaeus) and *P. luteolus luteolus* (Lesson) was studied in depth at Point Calimere in Tamil Nadu. A complementary study of the same aspect, where more than two species of bulbul coexist, was made at Thattakad and Ponmudi in Kerala. This study covered six species, namely *Pycnonotus priocephalus* (Jerdon), *P. melanicterus gularis* (Gould), *P. jocosus fuscicaudatus* (Gould), *P. cafer cafer* (Linnaeus), *P. luteolus luteolus* (Lesson), *Hypsipetes indicus indicus* (Jerdon) and *H. madagascariensis ganeesa* Sykes.

Many Indian bulbuls have a very peculiar distribution which has been commented on by several authors including Salim Ali (1935). A species common at one place may be completely absent a few miles away or at an adjoining higher elevation, or a different species may take its place. An attempt has been made in this investigation to identify some of the possible reasons for this phenomenon. A study of the different types of bulbul associations in various localities has also been included.

For evaluating the mode of ecological isolation in species that coexist certain basic facts of biology were investigated. The availability and seasonal fluctuation of the food supply, mainly insects and fruits, inside the study area were estimated along with a thorough analysis of the climatological features, to elicit the factors that determine the breeding of *P. cafer* and *P. luteolus*, and also to check whether there are any significant differences between the two.

Food and feeding habits were studied mainly by standard field observations and also by analysis of stomach contents of a few individuals of both species of bulbul. The height and part of the canopy where each fed were identified. Much overlap in the food was observed. The species are mainly isolated by their feeding niches and techniques rather than by food. The possible reasons for the overlap, and isolation in the food material, both vegetable and animal, are discussed.

The breeding season was studied by monitoring the area regularly for nests. The overall season for both bulbuls extends from August to March with two uncertain peaks, one in October and the other in February. The basic factors stimulating breeding in both the species were studied; when these factors coincide both breed in the same season, otherwise their breeding seasons differ. Rainfall has no direct relation to the breeding season. Details on nest, nesting materials, nesting location, egg-size, shape and colour, clutch and clutch-size variation their significance, incubation period, hatching, fledging and overall nesting

success were studied. Serious competition while breeding appears to be avoided mainly by the preference of each species for a different part of the bush (niche) for building the nest, and the use of different nesting material.

Other activities like preening, sunning, bathing and roosting were also studied. The preference of perches for preening and sunning was found to vary. Roosting time, and location of roost also differ between the two species.

An extensive tour was undertaken covering 54 localities mostly in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, from sea level up to about 2000 metres in the Western Ghats, in order to study the impacts of physiography and rainfall on the problems of coexistence. The distributional pattern of bulbul species in these areas, the spectrum of the flora and the dominant plant species, rainfall and elevation were collated. It was evident that vegetation is the most important single factor which determines the distribution of bulbuls. Ecological isolation in complex situations where more than two species of bulbul coexist, as at Thattakad and Ponmudi, is effected mainly through their preference for particular habitats. When two or more species occur in the same habitat competition appears to have been minimized because of their preference for different parts of the canopy.

My findings tend to support Gause's hypothesis that closely related species when coexisting have dissimilar ecological requirements thus avoiding or minimizing competition. The study also throws some light on the hitherto unknown factors that cause the peculiar patchy distribution in Indian bulbuls.

## CORRESPONDENCE

**AN UNUSAL GET TOGETHER BETWEEN A SQUIRREL AND A WOODPECKER.** P.O. NAMEER, 1st MSc (forestry), College of Forestry, Vellanikkara 680 654 Kerala

On 27th October 1991 I went for watching birds in the Veterinary College campus of Kerala Agricultural University, Mannuthy, Trichur district. On the previous evening it did rain and it was a pleasant morning with a gentle breeze. It was around 10 a.m. and I was observing a Greenish leaf warbler (*Phylloscopus trochiloides*). Then through the corner of my eye I saw a bird landing on the ground a few meters away from me. To my surprise I found it to be a Lesser goldenbacked woodpecker (*Dinopium benghalense*) (female) as it was for the first time that I was seeing a woodpecker on the ground. According to Santharam, V. (pers. comm.) woodpeckers do come to the ground occasionally for feeding on ants. My attention then turned to the woodpecker, because I just wanted to know what the woodpecker was doing on the ground. The bird

was actually feeding on a fruit of sapota (*Achras sapota*) which was lying on the ground. A minute or so would have passed and then I saw a Threestriped palm squirrel (*Funambulus palmarum*) approaching towards the fruit. When the woodpecker saw a squirrel coming towards it, at first it tried to chase the squirrel away by making a couple of mock charges. But then, later they became friendly and both started feeding on the very same sapota fruit simultaneously. This get together continued for about two minutes and the woodpecker flew away. The squirrel continued to 'feast' for another 2 more minutes and then left the place.

**MAGPIE ROBIN PREYING ON A LEECH.**  
S.KARTHIKEYAN, 24, Opp. Banashankari Temple, 8th Block, Jayanagar P.O., Bangalore 560 082

On 5 October 1991, while returning to campsite after a birdwatching session I happened to see a Magpie Robin *Copsychus saularis* male in the Muthodi village which falls in the Muthodi range of the Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary about 32 km from Chikmagalur.

The bird flew past me across the road from within a coffee plantation to a fence post of a hut. Jumping down to the ground it hopped a couple of times and was out of sight briefly. It emerged and returned to the fence post with a wriggling leech held in its beak. The leech was battered against the fence post and promptly swallowed.

Mason and Lefroy (1912) do not record a leech in the stomach contents of the 12 specimens they examined. Since there is hardly any information on the predators of leeches, birds as predators of leeches appears interesting. Also, this is the first record of a Magpie Robin preying on a leech.

#### REFERENCE:

Mason and Lefroy (1912): The food of birds in India; Mem. Agr. Dept. India, Entomological series, Vol.3, p 117-118.

**PYGMY WOODPECKER AND RUFOUS WOODPECKER IN BANGALORE, KARNATAKA.**  
S.KARTHIKEYAN, 24, Opp. Banashankari Temple, 8th Block, Jayanagar P.O., Bangalore 560 082

On 9 July 1988 during a visit to Bannerghatta National Park about 22 km from Bangalore a Pygmy Woodpecker *Picoides nanus* (Vigors) was seen moving along a thin branch of an almost dry tree inside the Herbivore safari (12°38'N, 77°34'E). The region is a dry deciduous forest with a profusion of Bamboo along with *Lantana*. Again this species was seen on 19th January 1991 during a visit to Ragihalli State Forest (12°46'N, 77°33'E) another pocket in the National Park. This time it was seen in a moist deciduous patch, on one of the smaller branches of a *Terminalia arjuna*.

A pair of Rufous Woodpecker *Micropternus brachyurus* (Viellot) was seen as it flew past calling on 6 August 1988 again inside the Herbivore Safari. Subsequently, on 17 January 1991 one was heard calling and later seen as it flew past and settled on a tree trunk. Both the sightings were in dry-deciduous habitats.

The sightings of the Pygmy Woodpecker and Rufous Woodpecker are of significance as they are being reported from Bangalore for the first time.

**FLOWERS IN THE DIETARY OF JERDON'S CHLOROPSIS.** J.N. PRASAD, 13, 8th Cross, 30th Main, J.P. Nagar, I Phase, Bangalore 560 078 and U. Harish Kumar, 7/187, PWD Quarters, BTS Road, 8th Cross, Wilson Gardens, Bangalore 560 027

While returning from a trip to Tailor tank organised by Birdwatchers' Field Club of Bangalore on 10th February 1991, we were attracted by the call of Shikra coming from a Rain Tree *Samanea saman* (Jacq.) Merr. near Kodihalli village (12°36'N, 77°04'E) in Maddur District Karnataka. On close observation we found that actually the call was being mimicked by a pair of Jerdon's Chloropsis *Chloropsis cochinchinensis* (Gmelin).

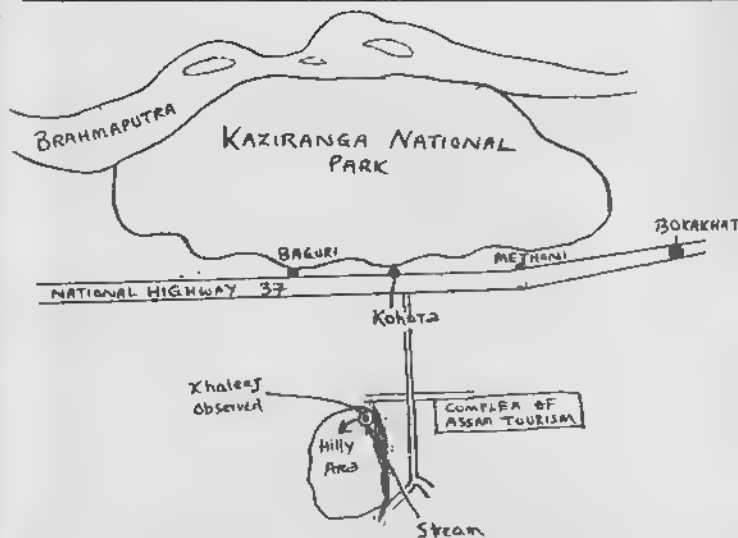
The birds were not disturbed when we moved below the Rain tree and later the male hopped on an adjacent *Pithecellobium dulce* (Roxb.) Benth, followed by the female a little later. Soon the male started plucking the flowers of *P. dulce* and swallowed it whole. In a span of ten minutes, the bird was observed swallowing the whole flower twice. Surprisingly the female was not observed feeding on the flowers.

We consider this observation to be of interest as according to Salim Ali and Dillon Ripley (1987, HANDBOOK, compact ed.), Chloropses are known only to feed on insects, berries, wild figs and nectar of many flowers.

**SIGHTING OF KHALEEJ PHEASANT NEAR KOHORA (KAZIRANGA).** BIBHAB KUMAR TALUKDAR, Samanwoy Path, Survey Basistha Road, P.O. Beltola, Guwahati 781 028, Assam

Kaziranga National Park lies between latitude 93.5 E & 93.40 E and longitude 26.30 N & 26.45 N. On 23rd February 1992 I went to Kaziranga National Park with my colleagues of Aaranyak Nature Club to participate in the habitat study program initiated by the said club. I stayed at Kunjaban, a guest house of Assam Tourism at Kohora (Kaziranga).

In the evening I went for a walk at 4.30 P.M. towards the hilly region which lies just behind the complex of Assam Tourism (Map : 1). Near the hills there is a small stream.



When I reached the stream as shown in the map, I suddenly observed a black bird with long tail. I promptly used my 7 x 50 binoculars and found that the bird is the Khaleej Pheasant (male). Then I also used my 20 x 50 telescope to confirm that it is Khaleej (*Lophura leucomelana*). The Khaleej came up to the stream and took some food mainly insects and some cooked food which was left there by some picnic party in the form of rice and dal. The Khaleej got disturbed by a flock of crows and flew back to the forest.

#### REDWINGED CRESTED CUCKOO AT ARIPPA. C.SUSANTH KUMAR, Prakriti, Perurkada P.O., Thiruvananthapuram 695 005, KERALA

While watching birds in Aripa (a small patch of forest 52 km from Thiruvananthapuram city) on 6-4-91 I saw a Redwinged crested Cuckoo (*Clamator coromandus*). In Kerala the Redwinged crested cuckoo is a scarce winter visitor. According to Ferguson 'It is a rare winter visitor to the Travancore hills'.

We were watching a hunting party of birds in a reed jungle near a forest path at 7.30 a.m. My little bird friend Manoj observed a new bird perching on a small tree near the reeds. He thought the bird was a Pied crested Cuckoo. We observed the bird for 40 minutes. Suddenly the bird turned towards us and erected its tail. After careful observation through the binoculars I could make out the colours of the bird. The chin and throat was chestnut colour, it had a white collar around the neck and a graduated tail with white feathers. The bird was a Redwinged crested Cuckoo. The movement of the bird was slow and sluggish. It caught a caterpillar from the undergrowth and swallowed it very quickly. Next moment, a pair of Yellowbrowed Bulbuls visited the same tree and made an alarm call. We found a nest of Yellowbrowed bulbuls near the Redwinged crested Cuckoo's perching tree. The Yellowbrowed Bulbuls may have suspected the Redwinged crested Cuckoo to be a

Crow Pheasant (notorious for eating eggs & young) and wanted to get rid of it. They won the battle, and the Redwinged crested Cuckoo flew away and disappeared far away from us.

#### A SUNBIRD'S BATH. DR. VIJAY TULJAPURKAR, Shivaji Road, Miraj 416 410

Keeping clean is one of the important activities of birds and birds use different methods to keep clean. They take dips in pools, wash their wings in shallow ponds, perch on a convenient branch and soak in rain, and so on and so forth. There are birds like sparrows who take a dust bath, while birds like munias preen each other, an activity called 'Allopreening'. I noticed a female purple sunbird bathing in an unusual way.

One corner of my garden is occupied by *Muraya exotica* which is about 8 feet tall. When the rains stop, the plants are watered every day or alternate day depending on the season. Since the 'Muraya' is close to the road dust settles on it. Water is sprinkled on it with a rubber pipe so as to clean the foliage. In this process droplets of water settle on the leaves and flowers.

One morning in the month of November 1991 around 8 a.m, while watching the birds, I noticed a female purple sunbird alighting on the *Muraya*. She moved from branch to branch and my first impression was that she was feeding. However, soon it became obvious that this was not so and she was shaking her body against the leaves. Intrigued, I watched the activity from a distance of 8 to 10 feet. The bird was not feeding but was in fact, brushing her wings and belly against the leaves which were soaked with water. The movements of wings were fairly rapid and within a matter of few minutes the bird was soaked wet.

She enjoyed her bath for 10 minutes or so and then flew to another tree nearby and started preening leisurely.

I later noticed this activity on a few more occasions whenever the *Muraya* was sprinkled with water.

#### BUTTERFLY SCARES A BIRD. N. SOUBADRA and T. GANESH, Research Scholars, Upper Kodayar 627 427, Tamil Nadu

Any thing small and solitary is scared of the big. But the way a small animal appears can sometimes induce a scare in a large one. An explicit example of this came recently while watching the visitors to the flowers of *Clerodendron viscosum* at Nalmukh in Kalakad Wildlife Sanctuary. The flowers of this small tree attracts many butterflies and other insects apart from birds that prey on them. Sitting inside this large leaved tree was a male Nilgiri Verditer Flycatcher (*Muscicapa albicaudata*), hawking away at some of the

insects coming to the flowers. All of a sudden, a hawk like object came diving from the sky. This sent the Verditer immediately into cover. Later as the 'hawk' object came down, it turned out to be nothing other than the largest Indian butterfly, Birdwing (*Tros helena*), innocently coming to feed on the flowers. If only the Birdwing knew, of this it could have had the heartiest laugh for scaring a bird from its perch.

**POSSIBLE SIGHTING OF A BAY OWL IN ANAIMALAI HILLS.** R. KANNAN, *Hornbill Project, Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary, Top Slip 642141, (via) Pollachi, Tamil Nadu*

This is to inform you that on 14 February 1992, a team of naturalists from Palni Hills Conservation Council, saw and photographed what could well have been the Bay Owl *Phodilus badius* in Karian Shola, Anaimalai Hills, about 1.5 km from Top Slip township. This is one of the rarest of Indian birds. There is just one specimen of this bird, from Nelliampathy Hills, Kerala (see Hussain & Khan, 1978: JBNHS 74:335). The Handbook says it is "apparently very rare. Unrecorded previously from peninsular India".

The team was guided by Natarajan, a local tribal and an excellent naturalist. I did not see the bird myself, although Natarajan and I combed the area for hours the very next day. However, my impression is that the species could have been nothing other than the Bay Owl, based on the habitat, location and descriptions given by the people who saw the bird.

I appeal to the people who took the photographs to publish the record in the JBNHS or the NEWSLETTER. This is too important a record to be lost. Since none of those involved are serious birders, I'm afraid it might be.

**ALBINISM IN BIRDS.** SALIM JAVED, *Centre Of Wildlife & Ornithology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh 202 002*

Albinism is a phenomenon related to the variation colouration caused by the absence of colour pigments, the melanin. Absence of melanin is due to the inborn error of metabolism in which the enzyme tyrosinase responsible for the conversion of 3-4 dihydroxyphenyl alanine (DOPA) is absent and due to it DOPA is not converted into melanin pigment.

Albinism is a recessive trait and in it melanocytes are present but not the melanin.

Four types of albinism have been reported/identified in birds.

1. **TOTAL ALBINISM:** When pigment is absent from plumage, irises and skin.

2. **INCOMPLETE ALBINISM:** When pigment is completely absent from the plumage or irises or skin but not from all the three parts.

3. **IMPERFECT ALBINISM:** When pigment is diluted in any or all the three areas.

4. **PARTIAL ALBINISM:** When pigment is partially or completely absent from parts of any or all the three areas.

**ALBINISM IN LITTLE BROWN DOVE.** SALIM JAVED, *Centre Of Wildlife & Ornithology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh 202 002*

While carrying out field studies in Aligarh on 7th March 1988 I saw an almost white bird perched on the nearby telegraph wire. The bird was of the size of little brown dove, the behaviour and posture also were similar to that of the little brown dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*, but there was variation in plumage colouration. It had an overall white plumage with primaries slightly gray. The chessboard was not prominent but contained some light spots. Apart from the plumage the bird had normal colouration on iris and skin. Such type of albinism where pigment is absent from the plumage but present in skin and irises is an example of incomplete albinism. Though cases of incomplete albinism are not uncommon, it is the first instance of such type in little brown dove from this region.

**AN UNUSUAL NESTING SITE OF PIED MYNA.** JUGAL KISHOR TIWARI, *Field Biologist, Bird Migration Study Project, Bombay Natural History Society*

On 1 July 1991, while travelling in a train near Mathura (U.P.) I found a nest of pied myna *Sturnus contra*. It was situated on a telephone pole along the railway line. I could easily see a pair of pied myna sitting near the nest.

The nest was a big irregular mass of straws and rugs, untidy in appearance. It was located at the junction of horizontal iron bars on the pole, c. 4 m from the ground, and fully exposed to sun and avian predators. According to Ali (Handbook, 1983) the nest of pied myna is found placed among the outer branches of trees. The nesting of pied myna on a telephone pole is unusual, and hitherto unreported.

**SIGHT AND BREEDING RECORD OF INDIAN JUNGLE CROW FROM PALI DISTRICT RAJASTHAN.** JUGAL KISHOR TIWARI, *Field Biologist, Bird Migration Study Project, Bombay Natural History Society*

On 14 June 1991 I was on a birdwatching trip at Ranakpur (c. 880 km west of Delhi) Pali District, Rajasthan. Unlike the other parts of Pali District, Ranakpur is well-wooded, a dry deciduous forest stands there in good



condition. I was surprised to see (c.60) Jungle Crows *Corvus macrorhynchos* in and around Ranakpur. I found a nest also which was having 2 fledglings. Ali (Handbook, 1983) describes status of this species "virtually absent from desert and semi-desert areas west of Delhi". Hence the present sight and breeding record of jungle crow deserves mention.

#### **SIGHTING OF A PUNJAB RAVEN AT KOTA.** RAKESH VYAS, 2-P-22, Vigyan Nagar, Kota, Rajasthan 324005

It was a foggy winter morning on 12th November 1991. I was watching waterfowl at Alniya Dam, about 25 km from Kota (25°10'N, 75°52'E). My attention was diverted by a strange call from far off. The call was deep and resonant. A little later, a large black bird appeared over me and started circling like a Scavenger Vulture. It was smaller than Scavenger Vulture, but bigger than any crow seen in the area. The tail was wedge shaped and fanned out. The bill was thick at the base. It kept circling overhead for about 5 minutes calling incessantly. Now, the call was throaty resonant Tronk-Tronk with a musical quality. It was easily identifiable as a Raven and was confirmed by the Compact Handbook of Birds of India & Pakistan, 'Ali & Ripley' as rare Punjab Raven. The Punjab Raven *Corvus corax subcorax* has been described as a very rare straggler in Rajasthan, thus this immediate reporting of its sighting.

#### **BREEDING OF HOOPOE IN ELECTRIC METER BOX.** R.G. SONI, Conservator of Forests, I.G.N.P., Stage-II, Sagar Road, Bikaner 334001

The Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) generally makes its nest in a hollow in tree trunk or crevices in mud or brick walls. However, at Bikaner I have seen this bird using an electric meter-box or case on a gate pillar, 5 ft above ground level, as the nest for three consecutive years 1989 to 1991. I am not sure if it was the same pair all the three years. During 1989 the first brood commenced with 6 eggs around mid February and 4 chicks flew off by 20.3.89. Second brood started with first egg laid on 26 or 27.3.89 that is 6 or 7 days after the chicks had flown out of the nest. The first chick then was hatched on 10.4.89, i.e. in 15 or 16 days. It was just like a small ball of loose snow-white cotton. Young ones have pink bare skin on lower side. They soon have dark goggles like colour around eyes and start turning brown. All chicks died on 20.4.89 due to some reason I could not figure out. The third brood was attempted with first egg laid around 8.5.89. Total six eggs were again laid but the mother did not incubate them at all. This meter-box was again used as nest during February-May '90 and '91.

#### **ALBINISM IN BIRDS.** R.G. SONI, Conservator of Forests, I.G.N.P., Stage-II, Sagar Road, Bikaner 334001

I have seen partially albino Redwattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*) and Redvented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*)

in Kota. In case of the Lapwing the upper plumage was white instead of bronze-brown, black on the throat and breast was there as usual, legs were yellow and eyes were brownish red. Two birds were frequently seen on the roadside between Kota and Bundi. Their territories were about 5 km from each other. They used to feed near the roadside drains and in the adjoining irrigated farms. One of them paired up with a normally coloured male bird and laid four eggs in a ploughed farm. The eggs were of normal colour with dark brown blotches. Both parents had shared the responsibility of incubation. The chicks were also of normal colour when hatched. I could not keep their track afterwards so cannot say if any of them had white upper plumage on having grown up.

I had also seen an almost fully white Redvented Bulbul at Kota in the Palace premises. There was slight greyish hue on head. It had red vent, reddish eyes and greyish legs. Its call was normal.

#### **SOME COMMON TRAITS AND RARE BEHAVIOUR OF THE KOEL.** THOMAS F. MARTIN, 12/16, Edward Road, Bangalore 560 052

The Koel *Eudynamis scolopacea* is an arboreal bird that occasionally comes down to the ground to prey on vertebrates. Like most members of the family Cuculidae, the koel is well-known for the habit of laying its eggs in the nests of other birds and leaving the chores of incubating and rearing of the brood to the hapless victims of delusion imposed upon them by this brood-parasitic species. Not all birds of the other classes are subject to their victimisation, as they very often put up a brave defence against such intrusion of their privacy and parental obligations. In areas where the koel's being chased away by groups of house crows *Corvus splendens* and the common mynas *Acridotheres tristis*, who relentlessly follow them wherever they go in a bid to deter or dislodge them from their nesting sites. Often several of the pursuers carry out a concerted and violent assault on these intruding koels and force them to make a hasty retreat from the locality. I have often been witness to such goings on in the vicinity of my abode, particularly during the breeding season of the house crows and common mynas.

The koel seems to be undemanding about its habitat, living just as happily in lightly wooded country and cultivation as in sprawling parks, garden surroundings and occasionally forests. Although they prefer to live among the trees, they do come down to the ground when catching sight of lizards, snakes and other vertebrates on whom they prey. Fruits and berries also form a part of their daily intake, as also insects of sorts. Relieving other smaller birds of a morsel of food by sheer bullying is not an unusual trait of the species.

By nature the koel is a very bold bird, and has that formidable aggressiveness by which it imposes its will on

those gullible birds that fall victim to its parasitic demeanour. According to simple facts, the koel is endowed with a high mental rating and designing characteristics; but in spite of this drawback of parasitism, the species have their plus points too on other counts, as brought out by my experience couched in the following paragraph.

On the 9th October 1991, whilst taking a casual stroll through Cubbon Park in Bangalore, I was treated to an unusual display by two black coloured koels that were perched on opposite branches of a tree and separated by about a foot or so. It was 5 p.m. when their movements and trilling utterances drew my attention, and so I approached the tree in an unassuming manner so as not to give them the impression that I was scouting for a close-up of their antics. When I had approached to within about 20 feet below the two koels, I casually stared up and discovered that they were holding a sort of conference in their own fashion of palavering. I stood at the said spot for fully 10 minutes, gazing at their entrancing behaviour. One of the two birds would vibrate its half closed wings and flip the tail while seemingly genuflecting at the other member, and at times would nod its head and utter a series of medium pitched notes which sounded not unlike 'koork, koork, koork, ..... ' with a trilling intonation. When the first member finished, the other would respond with almost similar gestures and utterances. At times they would stretch out their necks and clash their beaks in a manner typical of a fencing bout where the contestants cross swords in a move to parry a thrust and then break away in a retreating move. This parrying move was repeated on several occasions, and it would seem that the two were trying to force a point of contention on each other. However, and whatever be the motive for this peculiar behaviour, I was truly impressed and taken in by the display - after all, sign language also has a tale to tell. After a while, the pair decided to indulge in a wild chase of each other and flitted through the branches of the surrounding trees, all the time calling out in that typical warbling note of the species - a melodious and sometimes screaming utterance. Although I had often come across the species during my daily constitutional walks, this was the first time ever that I was treated to this extra-characteristic activity of theirs. I wonder if there are other birdwatchers who may have been witness to such activity of the species and, if any, would welcome their views on such behaviour in the Newsletter.

#### OBC-Fork-tail-Leica Award 1992

A small grant of Rs. 8000/- is awarded to Dr. J.C. UTTANGI, 36 Mission Compound Dharwad for conduct of studies of irrigation tanks used as wetland habitats by water birds in the areas of Dharwad District. The recipient

has to submit a preliminary report on the biological productivity of these sites within one month after the completion of the field survey and a detailed report within six months. Depending upon the results and the conservation needs the OBC will consider to take up the matter to the concerned authorities at different levels, for implementation.

#### NEWS FROM ICBP · Speedbirding'91,

The year-long, round-the-world birdwatch by British Airways steward Charlie Moores, has now come to an end. During the year, Charlie saw 1856 species, in 1,000 hours of birding from 30 of the world's major cities. Sites varied from a Brazilian rainforest, and Asian wetland, an African savanna to a particularly rewarding afternoon around Melbourne's Werribee sewage farm! Some of the more exciting species included Turner's Eromomela, Orange-bellied Parrot, Yellow-billed magpie, Tawny-browed Owl, Lanceolated Jay and Izu Island Thrush, to name just a few.

Sponsorship money, which goes towards ICBP's Project Sisserou in Dominica, is now coming in, and ICBP is extremely grateful to all those who have supported the project, particularly British Airways, Hertz, Dominica Tours and Travellers Tree.

All individual sponsors were entered in a draw for a two week holiday in Dominica, kindly provided by British Airways and Dominica Tours. The holiday has been won by Jean Dodd from Dover, U.K.

#### Book Reviews

Breeding birds of Kashmir by R.S.P. Bates and E.H.N. Lowther, Oxford University Press, 1991. 367pp £16 (hb). First published in 1952, this attractive book remains the definitive work on the birds of the Vale of Kashmir and neighbouring valleys. The field identification, distribution, habits and nesting of 116 breeding species are covered in detail, and there are brief notes on a further 45 species. The book is illustrated with 151 black-and-white photographs taken by the authors, and five colour plates.

Wetlands edited by M. Finlayson and M. Moser. Facts on File, Oxford, 1991. 224pp. £19.95 (hb). Wetlands are among the most productive ecosystems on earth, but are fast becoming one of the most threatened. This book is therefore a timely review of the status and value of the world's major wetlands, and represents the culmination of more than 20 years work documenting wetlands through a programme of regional directories. The editors of Wetlands hope that the publication of their attractive, superbly illustrated, popular book will reach a broader spectrum of society than the directories, thereby strengthening the political and economic will to conserve wetlands.

## WETLANDS REPRIEVE

Two important sites for wildlife in Venezuela have won a reprieve, thanks to a campaign by the Venezuelan Audubon Society and help from HRH Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands.

Huge numbers of migratory shore-birds and ducks feed at both the Cuare Wildlife Refuge on the coast of western Venezuela and the Píritu lagoon, on the north-eastern coast. Both are also important for the only population of Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber* in the southern Caribbean. Cuare is also one of only six places in the world where the threatened Plain-flanked Rail *Rallus wetmorei* has been recorded. Declared a Wildlife Refuge in 1972, it is Venezuela's only Ramsar site.

By June 1991, concern had mounted over developments that threatened both

areas. There were plans for a golf course, tourist facilities and a road at Cuare, and a huge salt-producing complex and another road at Píritu.

The Venezuelan Audubon Society launched a campaign calling for Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) to be performed for these developments. It also called for the implementation of a management plan for Cuare, that has already been approved by the Ministry of the Environment.

The Prince was alerted to the problem by the former Dutch Ambassador to Venezuela, Chris Thirkow, and discussed the issue with Venezuelan President Carlos Pérez during the president's visit to the Netherlands.

The Venezuelan government has now undertaken that developments will not proceed until EIAs have been performed, and the results properly assessed.



Greater Flamingo. Cuare is the most important feeding site for this species in the southern Caribbean (Photo: LIPU)

## EC LEGISLATION - ADOPTION VERSUS IMPLEMENTATION

European conservation received a boost in December 1991, with the adoption by the European Community of the Directive on the Conservation of Natural and Semi-natural Habitats of Wild Fauna and Flora (commonly known as the Habitats Directive). Several European organisations, including the RSPB, lobbied long and hard over the issue, and the acceptance of the directive is a significant victory for them and for conservation. The directive will come into force in the spring of 1995.

Under the directive, EC Member States must designate Special Areas for Conservation (SACs) in their country for habitat types, plants and animals listed in the directive (birds are not included as they are already covered by the EC

Wild Birds Directive). The deterioration of these areas must be avoided.

Unfortunately, experience of other EC legislation shows that the speed of implementation is likely to be far from satisfactory. The Wild Birds Directive was passed by the EC in 1979 and required designation of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for listed bird species.

Despite official identification, designation of SPAs by EC member governments has been extremely slow. A recent report by ICBP reveals that of the 1,681 qualifying sites, only 504 have so far been even partially designated as SPAs - just 30% of the area in ten years. If the current rate of designation continues, it will take until the year 2053 for all the sites to receive the protection



The Nestos Delta is one of only 26 SPAs in Greece; 90 Important Bird Areas remain to be designated as SPAs (Photo: G. Duke) required under EC law.

The priority that should be given to protecting wildlife and wildlife habitat has been recognised by the EC. It is now up to member governments to fulfil their commitments.

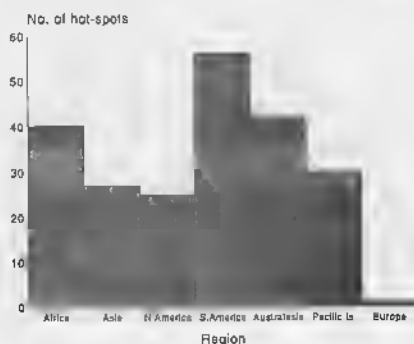
## 2% SAVES 20%

Early results from ICBP's Biodiversity Project have revealed that 20% of the world's bird species only occur in 2% of the earth's land surface.

The project has collected data on all bird species with restricted (less than 50,000 km<sup>2</sup>) ranges. The results show that high concentrations of these endemic species occur in a relatively small number of areas. Moreover, further research indicates that these hot-spots are equally rich in endemic species of plants and other animals.

The implications of these findings for conservation are clearly significant. A very large number of species could be saved by a comparatively small number of initiatives. Conversely, the loss or degradation of these areas would result in very large numbers of extinctions.

The final analysis of the data from the project (over 55,000 individual records) is now underway, with the results being published in May this year. This publication should be an important stimulus for future initiatives in the conservation of biological diversity.



The distribution of hot-spots by continent

## EXPERIENCED BIRDWATCHERS REQUIRED. 1992 Autumn Migration Survey, Israel.

For the annual Raptor, Stork and Pelican Migration Survey in the Northern Valleys, Israel (10 August - 20 October).

During the autumn of 1991, over a period of 45 days, some 806,000 migrating birds were counted in the skies above Israel. These included 580,000 raptors of 30 different species, 190,000 White Storks and 36,000 White Pelicans.

You are invited to join an international team of bird-watchers to experience the busiest migration route in the western Palearctic.

The minimum participation period will be three weeks. You will have to cover the cost of your travel to and from Israel, we will cover the cost of food and lodging in Israel.

If you are an experienced birdwatcher, capable and willing to watch migration for a minimum of 8 hours a day, please inform as soon as possible, enclosing details of your previous experience to :-

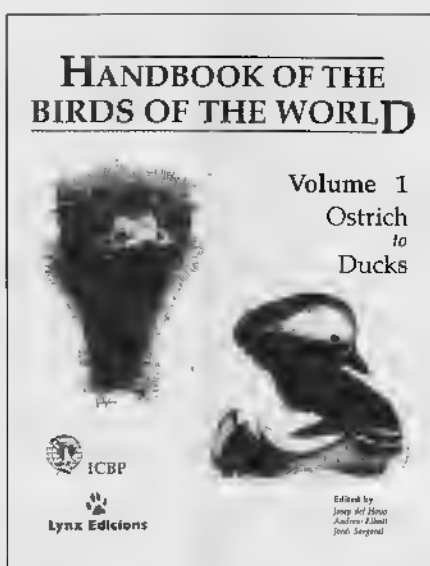
HAIM ALFIA, Israel Raptor Information Center (IRIC), Har-Gilo, Doar Na Zfon Yehuda, 90907 Israel,  
Tel: 9722932383/4 Fax: 9722932385

## HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF THE WORLD - For the first time ever, all species illustrated

The Handbook of the Birds of the World, of which volume I (Ostrich to Ducks) is due out in September, is a milestone in natural history publishing. ICBP is involved in the handbook, which is being published by Lynx Edicions, with Research Fellow Nigel Collar reviewing the sections on the status and conservation of each species. There is also an article on ICBP's role worldwide, its aims and some of its achievements.

For the first time ever, all species of a class of animals will be treated in detail, with illustrations of each. The handbook covers all aspects of bird biology and, in addition, represents the first attempt to review the status of all the world's 9,000 plus bird species, threatened and non-threatened. There is also a summary of the factors affecting the conservation of each species; it comes as no surprise to find that habitat destruction is the most frequently cited cause, followed by direct exploitation by man. The book also highlights the most important gaps in our knowledge, and should help to indicate possible areas for future research.

Each family forms a separate chapter of the book, and the general family text is amply illustrated with photographs,



which have been specially selected to show aspects of behaviour, as well as rarely-seen species. This is followed by the plates illustrating all the species of the family, with females and morphs, where appropriate, and all the distinctive sub-species.

The plates have been painted by a team of five artists, and several species are illustrated for the first time. The work involved in collecting information on such species has been considerable, with visits to zoos and museums on the

five continents. For the preparation of the texts over 1,500 books have been used, as well as several thousand articles.

ICBP's worldwide conservation programme will benefit from all sales of the handbook, but most substantially from those during the pre-publication offer (see enclosed leaflet). We thoroughly recommend the book to all ICBP members, and to ornithologists in general.

### NEWSLETTER CALLING

#### ENROL A FRIEND

If every Newsletter Member could enrol just one new member our effectiveness would be doubled immediately!

#### WILL YOU HELP?

Please give the membership forms to your friends and urge them to join.

**Cover:** Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*). This Stork wades knee deep in lakes with neck bent down and mandibles open like a giant forceps, probing deftly for fish, frogs and crabs. At the outset of the harvest season, the Painted Storks make a bee-line to Kokre Bellur in Karnataka, for nesting on calm trees surrounding the thatched houses. For the villagers these sprightly coloured birds of pink, white and black are a joy to behold and protect.

Photo : S. Sridhar, ARPS

Courtesy: World Birdwatch, March 1992